

Catalyst for Nature-centric Awareness and Governance

Supported by the V. Kann Rasmussen Foundation

This article summarises the VKRF-funded project [Catalyst for Nature-centric Awareness and Governance](#) (or Nature-Centric Catalyst, for short). Reading researchers: Matt Pritchard, Marzia Briel, Tom Oliver.

The overarching aim of the project is to radically transform the way we govern to urgently reverse nature decline. We are seeking to look beyond governance approaches that are based on a misplaced sense of human exceptionalism and, instead, are rooted in attitudes of deep care and reverence for nature. This necessary culture change reflects [growing consensus](#) across major science policy reports from organisations such as IPBES, UNDP, UNEP, EEA, IPCC.

To help make wiser governance approaches possible, our aim is to catalyse the shift in consciousness that is already underway– towards a human identity more deeply rooted in nature. We will gather diverse research to piece together evidence-based developmental pathways that decentre the human and embrace our reintegration into the web of life, along with ‘a toolkit’ of alternative governance approaches that reflect this paradigm of nature-connection and accelerate nature restoration.



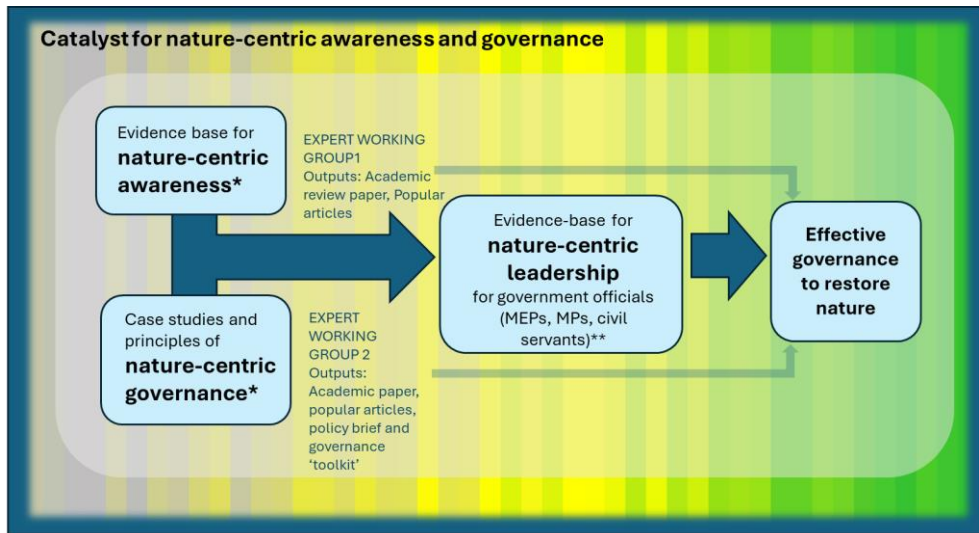
Project organisation: Details of the project team are found [here](#). Early on in the project, we established a Steering Group comprising the former Leader of the Green Party and senior representatives from the civil service (Defra, MHCLG, Environment Agency, DESNZ), think tanks (Chatham House, The Royal Society, Inner Green Deal), and European environmental organisations (European Environment Agency, Joint Research Centre Europe).

Image credit: artist Nina Montenegro

We liaised with the steering group to review a Theory of Change (ToC) reflecting the impacts on our target stakeholders (government officials), though we recognised the potential extension of our approach to influence business, legal and education audiences in later phases (Fig. 1). We evolved this initial ToC in several ways: 1) we decided to use the term nature ‘connectedness’ rather than ‘awareness’ to reflect prevailing academic nomenclature (even though we feel that the current focus on pathways to nature connectedness is somewhat limited; see outputs); 2) rather than two separate working groups for nature connectedness and governance, we developed a series of integrated workshops focussing on different aspects of both. The workshops were as follows (held in May, June & Nov 2025, with one March 2026):

- **Mainstreaming nature-centric governance: risks, barriers and opportunities**
- **Addressing the housing crisis from a nature-centric perspective**
- **Systemic risk and effectiveness framework for environmental solutions (supported by additional funding from ARIA)**
- **Nature-Centric Governance Approaches and Implications for UK Policy**

“It’s hard to look up from Westminster wrangling to imagine what the world could be like, especially when the pace of academic insight is so often misaligned with the frantic tempo of politics. The Nature-Centric Governance work was a brilliant exception. It combined cutting-edge research with colourful imagination in a way that’s utterly relevant for contemporary questions like public body reform and water industry governance. We’ll definitely apply the lessons and I left eager for the next stages of the work.” - Richard Benwell, Chief Executive of Wildlife and Countryside link



* Major science-policy initiatives like IPBES, IPCC, UNDP, UNEP and the EEA have established that current governance approaches focussing only on technology, regulatory and economic levers are ineffective and deeper cultural change is needed.
 ** Prototyped with government officials and broadened to business, legal, education audiences in later phases.

Fig 1, Initial Theory of Change for the project

Philosophy behind the workshop design – evoking Nature-centric philosophical and spiritual shifts. Using compound effects theory, we realised that the venue and method of delivery of nature-centric approaches is an important element to having a lasting impression on attendees to the workshops. To this end, we included elements in our workshops that evoke deeper value shifts. We hosted the workshops in Nature abundant venues, with time for working outdoors ensuring Nature is felt and experienced during the day.

In addition, we facilitated nature-connection activities in collaboration with local indigenous wisdom keepers. In workshop 1, we arranged a guided nature meditation and walk on the hill behind the workshop venue, including a talk on the geology, history and mythology of the area (e.g. [video](#)). In workshop 2, we ran a sound meditation (‘gong bath’) after the workshop.

In the evening we ran a ‘Nature-Centric Coffee House’, which allowed for deeper philosophical nature connection - blending the academic workshop with philosophical enquiry. We invited artists, community activists and nature-centric practitioners. We used ‘provocation’ prompts left on the table to enable open debate on nature-centric approaches leading to deeper philosophical spiritual shifts through the sharing of motivations, inspirations, poetry and music.

We received very positive feedback on the way in which we blended, on the same day, an academic, analytical workshop with a more social, artistic and spiritual Coffee House, in order to combine mental and emotional engagement with nature-centric philosophy.

Outputs

We believe the Catalyst is beginning to make a significant impact in shaping the emerging fields of nature connectedness and nature-centric governance. We have produced a number of outputs to help develop this impact, which are summarised here:

- Pritchard, M., Tovey, P., Tickell, P. & Oliver, T. H. (2025) [Catalysing Transformational Change through Compound Nature Connectedness Interventions](#) (*Ambio*)
- Pritchard, M., Briel, M., Tovey, P., Tickell, P. & Oliver, T. H. The Uses and Abuses of Immersive Technology for Nature Connectedness. In J. Reed (ed.), *Postdigital Nature Connection*. Springer (book chapter, in press)
- Pritchard, M., Briel, M., Tovey, P. & Oliver, T. H. Awesome Facts: Revisiting the Knowledge Pathway for Nature Connectedness (in prep)

- Pritchard, M., Tickell, P., Briel, M., Tovey, P. & Oliver, T. H. What is Nature-Centric Governance? Representing Nature in an era of Ecological Crisis (in prep)
- Pritchard, M., Briel, M., Tovey., P. & Oliver, T. H. Opportunities and Challenges for Introducing Nature-Centric Housing in the UK *Planning Theory* (in press)
- Pritchard, M. Nature Representation and the Priestly Class *Zygon Journal of Religion and Science* (in review)
- Briel, M, Pritchard, M., Oliver, T. A Systemic risk and effectiveness framework for environmental solutions (in prep).

Beyond these academic outputs, we have produced several lay articles. We are also working with the **UK Museum for English Rural Life** to host a **nature-centric exhibition piece** based on our work (opening May 2026). This exhibition will include a guided meditation helping people feel a sense of connection to nature, along with associated information about the role of mindset change in addressing the nature crisis.



Fig. 2. Images from the nature-centric coffee house events following academic work

Example workshop feedback:

“This was a truly inspiring workshop. To be together in the same room with so many environmental leaders, and to be offered the time and space to dig deep into some of the most cutting edge developments and debates in the field of nature rights and ecology, was an unprecedented opportunity for profound learning and exchange. Being able to do so in the beautiful surroundings of Goring and Streatley meant it was an even more intimate and meaningful event. Fresh approaches were explored and new relationships were forged, which will now be carried into my ongoing work. Very many thanks again for this very special meeting” - Caroline Lucas, Previous MP for Brighton and Leader of Green Party UK.

“I found it truly stimulating and such a special day.” It was such a privilege to be in a space where I was surrounded by senior leaders I deeply admire...It is so rare, but I found during the day we were all able to connect not just via our minds but our hearts too especially in the evening” - Ramandeep Nijjar, UoR Zoology student

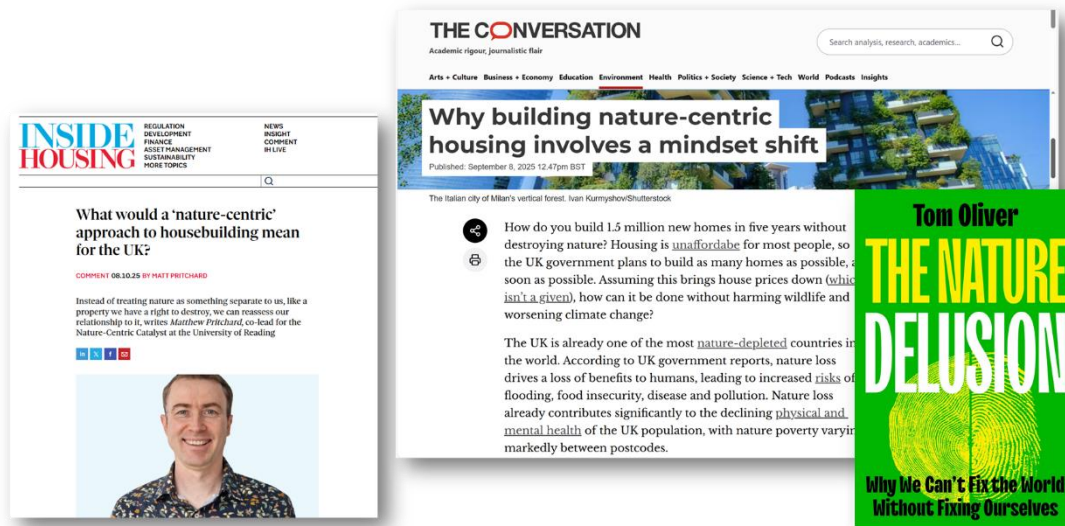


Fig 3. Lay articles produced during the project

Book

- Tom Oliver. 2026. [The Nature Delusion: Why We Can't Fix the World Without Fixing Ourselves](#). Bristol University Press.

Popular Articles

- Pritchard and Oliver 'Building nature back in: the prospect of nature-centric housing' *Environmental Scientist* article (in press)
- Tom Oliver: [Winter's natural wonders: seven tips to entice you and dose yourself up with joy](#) The Conversation 2026
- Tom Oliver: [Why building nature-centric housing requires a mindset shift](#). *The Conversation*, 8 September 2025.
- Matt Pritchard: [What would a 'nature-centric' approach to housebuilding mean for the UK?](#) Inside Housing, 8 October 2025.
- Matt Pritchard: [The case for nature-centric housing](#). Housing Quality Magazine, October 2025 edition.
- Tom Oliver [Rewilding the Dictionary](#) The Beautiful Truth, Apr 2025 (also interviewed for the [Guardian](#)).
- Tom Oliver [Awakening the nature-centric mindset - 'The Rethink' ASRA](#), April 2025

What should happen next?

We believe there is an explosion of interest in the environmental philosophy and practice of reconnecting to nature, particularly in the UK and Europe. In this project, we have also focussed on the associated structural/institutional changes that can reinforce, support and further catalyse this cultural shift, which is recognised as essential by major science policy organisations.

These structural changes can be guided by wisdom from traditional indigenous cultures; in combination with new scientific and social science research, they require careful consideration to apply effectively to the modern 'western' context.

Innovations such as Rights of Nature, Nature on the Board and multispecies assemblies may help not only in Government settings but also in diverse organisational settings, such as private corporations. These institutional changes, however, must be accompanied by deeper value shifts. Our project, along with others operating in this space, develops ways to challenge to the existing anthropocentric paradigm while offering evidence-based nature-centric alternative approaches.

To follow progress on the Nature-Centric Catalyst project keep an eye on our [webpage](#) and sign up for further updates [here](#).